United Nations A/C.1/57/PV.24

General Assembly
Fifty-seventh session

Official Records

First Committee
24th meeting
Wednesday, 30 October 2002, 10 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Kiwanuka ..... (Uganda)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 59

Question of Antarctica

General debate, consideration of and action on draft resolutions

The Chairman: At this stage, I would like to suspend the meeting so that we can have the necessary consultations.

The meeting was suspended at 10.05 a.m. and resumed at 10.50 a.m.

The Chairman: Let me start with the First Committee. In accordance with our programme of work and timetable, we begin the fourth phase of our work: on general debate consideration of and action on draft resolutions submitted under agenda item 59, "Question of Antarctica".

In this connection I would like to draw the Committee's attention to the report of the Secretary-General contained in A/57/346.

I invite delegations wishing to participate in the debate kindly to add their names to the list of speakers as soon as possible in order to enable the Committee to fully utilize the conference facilities available to it.

Mr. Sarkowicz (Poland): I have the honour today of addressing the First Committee on behalf of the States parties to the Antarctic Treaty. The Antarctic Treaty parties are pleased to note that 23 June 2001 marks the fortieth anniversary of the entry into force of the landmark Antarctic Treaty, which was initially signed by 12 States in Washington on 1 December 1959. In those 40 years an additional 33 States have joined the original 12 signatories and become parties to the Treaty, bringing the total to 45 States representing more than 80 per cent of the world's population. Of those 45 States, 27 parties have been accorded Consultative Party status by virtue of their substantial scientific research activity in Antarctica.

Since the entry into force of the Antarctic Treaty, the Consultative Parties have adopted numerous regulatory measures to provide for the effective management and governance of Antarctica. By these means the Antarctic Treaty has successfully guaranteed that this vast continent remains dedicated to peace, international cooperation and scientific endeavour. The importance of Antarctic science, involving processes vital to the health of the entire planet and sustainable development for all humankind, is ever increasing.

Since the General Assembly last addressed the question of Antarctica, during its fifty-fourth session in 1999, the intervening period has witnessed further strengthening of the Antarctic Treaty. On 17 May 2001, Estonia acceded to the Treaty, becoming the forty-fifth party. An important milestone during the past three years has been the 10-year anniversary, on 4 October 2001, of the signing of the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. On 25 May 2001 Ukraine became the latest State to accede

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to the Protocol. There are now 29 parties to the Protocol, including all Consultative Parties and two non-Consultative Parties, Greece and Ukraine.

The main purpose of the Protocol, which entered into force on 14 January 1998, is to provide for the comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment and dependent and associated ecosystems. To that end the Protocol designates Antarctica as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science. It prohibits mineral resource activities other than for scientific research and prescribes environmental principles and measures for the planning and conduct of human activity in Antarctica. The Protocol includes five annexes dealing with: environmental impact assessment; conservation of Antarctic fauna and flora; waste disposal and waste management; prevention of marine pollution; and area protection and management. All the annexes form an integral part of the Protocol. Annexes I through IV were adopted at the same time as the Protocol. Annex V, which was adopted subsequently, required separate approval by all Consultative Parties to enter into force. During the three-year period under review, the remaining Consultative Parties provided notification of their approval of recommendation XVI-10 containing the text of annex V to the Protocol. Consequently, annex V entered into force on 24 May 2002. States parties to the Antarctic Treaty have also been discussing one or more additional annexes to the Protocol to cover liability for environmental damage. In accordance with articles 11 and 12 of the Protocol, a Committee for Environmental Protection was inaugurated at the twenty-second Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, held in Tromso, Norway, in 1998 to provide advice and formulate recommendations on the implementation of the Protocol for consideration by the Consultative Meetings.

Since the entry into force of the Protocol, the Committee has met annually five times in conjunction with the Consultative Meetings. It has now firmly established itself as the primary technical advisory body to the Antarctic Treaty parties. The Committee's work programme is significant and over the last three years the Committee has dealt with a broad range of issues including comprehensive environmental evaluation for major activities on the continent, procedures for the designation of specially protected Antarctic species and means to strengthen the Antarctic protected area systems.

The ongoing work of the Committee relates to issues including the environmental consequences of penetrating subglacial lakes and comprehensive revision of the various annexes to the environmental Protocol.

As officially designated observers to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) and the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programmes (COMNAP) are important elements of the Antarctic Treaty system. SCAR coordinates scientific research carried out by national Antarctic programmes, identifies priorities for international cooperation and advises the Treaty system on scientific aspects of environmental protection issues.

COMNAP advises the Treaty system on operational issues concerning the conduct of scientific research and environmental protection and also coordinates logistical support for multinational scientific research activities. COMNAP also develops guidelines for protecting the environment from operational activities and for enhancing the safety of land-, air- and ship-based operations, and encourages the adoption of best practices by the national programs. COMNAP and SCAR often work collaboratively on these and other subjects.

A key element of the Antarctic Treaty system is the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). Since the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, the Convention has achieved the milestone twentieth anniversaries of its adoption, on 20 May 1980, and of its entry into force, on 7 April 1982. In the last three years, both Namibia and Vanuatu have acceded to the Convention, increasing the number of States parties to 31. Namibia also became a member of the Commission on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources on 5 February 2001, thus increasing its membership to 24. The 21st meeting of the Commission is currently being held in Hobart, Tasmania, from 21 October to 1 November.

The Commission's activities cover a wide range of issues. In the last three years, the most significant have included continuing attempts to curb illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing in the Convention area; implementing a catch-documentation scheme for toothfish; developing an integrated fisheries management framework; assessing krill biomass in the

Atlantic sector of the area of the Convention; making greater efforts to eliminate seabird by-catch in long-line fisheries; and monitoring marine debris and their impact on Antarctic animals.

Work at the current session has focused on strengthening measures to combat illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, in particular tighter flag State control and wider participation in the catch documentation scheme. Four non-CCAMLR parties are now participating in the scheme.

The success and ongoing development of the Antarctic Treaty system are largely attributable to the work performed by the annual Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings. Since the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, three such meetings have taken place: in The Hague, from 11 to 15 September 2000; in St. Petersburg, from 9 to 20 July 2001; and in Warsaw, from 10 to 20 September 2002. At each of those meetings, further steps were taken to strengthen the regulatory framework for Antarctica, thereby protecting the Antarctic environment.

At the 2000 Antarctic Treaty Special Consultative Meeting in The Hague, representatives, on the advice of the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP), adopted revised management plans and extended the expiry dates of existing management plans for numerous specially protected areas and sites of special scientific interest. Also adopted was an extensive set of "Guidelines for implementation of the Framework for Protected Areas, as described in article 3, annex V, of the Environmental Protocol." The guidelines provide a set of tools to enable a more systematic assessment, selection, definition, and proposal of areas that might require greater protection in accordance with annex V of the Protocol.

The 2001 St. Petersburg Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting will be remembered in particular for the historic decision that was taken there to establish an Antarctic Treaty secretariat in the city of Buenos Aires. Resolutions were also adopted urging all Antarctic Treaty parties to implement the CCAMLR catch documentation scheme for toothfish and to take such legal or administrative steps as are necessary to preserve Antarctic meteorites for scientific purposes.

With regard to historical sites and monuments, the Meeting recommended that the parties review such sites and adopt a set of guidelines for handling pre-1958 historical remains. The Meeting also took steps to broaden information exchange and public access under the Treaty, recommending that the parties provide relevant information to a central information exchange web site to be hosted by Argentina, or provide that site with relevant links to where the information could be found. Furthermore, a process was initiated to review the status of recommendations, measures, decisions and resolutions adopted by all previous Meetings to determine which had been superseded or were otherwise obsolete.

The XXVth Meeting, held recently in Warsaw, continued to work on the establishment of the secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty. Draft instruments regarding the establishment of such a secretariat have been prepared. These texts, still under consideration, will be taken forward to the XXVIth Meeting, to be held in Madrid in June 2003. It is to be hoped that consensus will be achieved there on the conclusion of these modalities for the establishment of the Secretariat.

The Meeting held in Warsaw also adopted a decision on an emblem for the Antarctic Treaty, by converting the symbol used hitherto in practice into the formal emblem of the Treaty to be used by the Meeting, and by the Antarctic Treaty secretariat, once established. Revised guidelines for document translation and distribution were also adopted. These allow the use of modern means of communication in preparations for meetings. Several recommendations aimed at streamlining the work of the Meetings were also agreed, namely on the long-term planning of the agenda and the working groups and on the consultations between the host Governments of the current and the next Meeting.

The meeting also examined ways to shorten the time between the adoption and the entry into force of measures taken under article IX of the Treaty, by means of a fast-tracking mechanism for the entry into force of adopted measures. Discussions on this topic will be continued at the forthcoming Meeting in Madrid. On the advice of the CEP, the XXVth Meeting also adopted a measure on management plans for 13 Antarctic Treaty protected areas, while the naming and numbering of Antarctic specially protected areas was changed by means of decision 1 (2002).

Throughout the period under review, the Antarctic Treaty parties have continued to work towards establishing rules and procedures relating to

liability for damage arising from activities taking place in the Antarctic Treaty area and covered by the Environmental Protocol. Considerable progress has been made towards achieving consensus, and the Treaty parties will continue to work towards an effective annex on liability to the Environmental Protocol.

Another area of continuing work in progress is towards the development of guidelines for shipping in the Antarctic Treaty area. Increasing tourism and a trend towards larger passenger vessels necessitate guidelines designed to improve the safety and environmental protection standards of such vessels. It is envisaged that guidelines relating to Antarctic shipping will, in due course, be adopted by the International Maritime Organization by means of modifications to the Antarctic shipping guidelines already under scrutiny by that organization.

The Antarctic Treaty system is a constantly evolving mechanism. The Treaty is open to accession by all Members of the United Nations and any other State that might be invited, and the parties will continue to give special encouragement to all States with an active interest in Antarctica to accede to the Treaty and its environmental Protocol.

I am pleased to report that the commitment of the Antarctic Treaty parties to ensuring the effectiveness of the Treaty in protecting the Antarctic environment continues to be strong. The parties are also committed to ensuring that the use of Antarctica is limited to peaceful scientific purposes. To that end, the Treaty and its more recent environmental Protocol have proved remarkably effective in achieving the stated objectives.

Mr. Zainuddin (Malaysia): It has been three years since the Committee last met to consider this important subject. My delegation is grateful to the Secretary-General for his important report contained in document A/57/346. We note that the structure of the report is identical to that of its predecessor. The report is informative and provides useful updates on activities undertaken by the Antarctic Treaty system and several international bodies to promote the protection and conservation of the continent as a natural laboratory.

Malaysia commends the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties for their cooperation in sharing pertinent information, as called for by General Assembly resolution 54/45. We hope that this positive trend will continue to be strengthened.

My delegation is cognizant of the fact that the current report is more concise than that submitted at the fifty-fourth session because of the paging requirement. We hope that in future this limitation will not be adhered to too strictly, given the triennial nature of the report and the importance of furnishing the international community with adequate information on Antarctica. We hope that the report will, in future, be further expanded to include more detailed information for the broader membership of the Organization.

We wish to commend the United Nations Environment Programme for the role it has played in the process and for its input to the report. As a specialized programme of the United Nations dealing with the issue of the environment, it has an important and indispensable role to play in providing the link between the Antarctica Treaty system and the larger international community.

When this item was first introduced in 1984, during the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly, few countries realized the importance of Antarctica to the well-being of the planet and humanity. That is no longer true, however. The debate on the question of Antarctica over the years in the United Nations has contributed significantly to raising the international community's interest in and awareness of the white continent — the last frontier on planet Earth. While the debate has acknowledged the achievement of the Antarctic Treaty system, it has also questioned the adequacy of what was essentially an exclusive arrangement in accommodating the concerns and interests of the international community.

We are gratified that, as a result of this constructive engagement, there is now greater transparency and accountability with regard to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties' activities in Antarctica, as reflected in the periodic reports submitted to the General Assembly. Malaysia continues to believe that the United Nations, as a representative global body with a network of specialized organs such as UNEP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Maritime Organization and the WMO, as well as the World Tourism Organization, is the most appropriate authority to monitor, administer and enforce the various scientific and non-scientific activities in Antarctica. We

note, however, that there has been a considerable broadening of cooperation between the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources and some United Nations specialized agencies. This cooperation should be further enhanced and intensified in the vital interests of protecting the Antarctic environment.

The entry into force on 14 January 1998 of the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection of the Antarctic Treaty was an important milestone in the efforts to preserve and protect the pristine environment of the southern continent as "world territory". Under the Protocol, Antarctica is recognized as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science. The Protocol prohibits mineral resource activities other than scientific research and establishes principles and measures for the planning and conduct of all human activities in the Antarctic Treaty area. Malaysia welcomes, in particular, the Protocol's 50-year moratorium on prospecting and mining in Antarctica and expresses the hope that this will constitute a first, but important, step towards a permanent ban on mining on the continent.

Although the Madrid Protocol is the most comprehensive environmental instrument regulating all human activities in Antarctica, its enforcement is based solely on the commitment of the parties. Malaysia urges the parties to the Protocol to continue to report on the status of their national implementation of the Protocol. We have noted that only 22 member countries submitted annual reports at the last two Consultative Meetings. It is not clear how many States parties submitted their reports at the recent Twenty-fifth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, held in Warsaw, as the Secretary-General's report was issued before the Meeting was held. Perhaps the Committee could be updated on that matter.

It was noted that at the Twenty-fifth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting the issue of the establishment of a permanent secretariat for the Antarctica Treaty was discussed, and a consensus reached to locate the secretariat in Buenos Aires. We trust that the establishment of such a secretariat will, inter alia, further enhance transparency with regard to the activities of the Antarctic consultative parties.

My delegation is also concerned that the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties have yet to achieve full implementation on the question of liability for environmental damage. Such implementation is important, as it would encourage compliance and promote accountability among States members of the Antarctic Treaty. Without filling that gap, the Madrid Protocol will be perceived as being incomplete. Malaysia reiterates that a strict regime will send a clear message to the world that in Antarctica the protection of the environment is of paramount importance.

Related to this issue is that of drilling. We have been following with great interest the proposal by some States parties to drill in the largest freshwater lake on that continent, the pristine and unique 400,000-year-old Lake Vostok. With its palaeoclimatic mystery, that lake is a natural museum that should not be contaminated by imprudent actions. Otherwise, some of its vast store of potential information might be permanently lost or distorted. We believe that drilling and related activities for scientific purposes should be appropriately regulated and that all aspects of any activity must be thoroughly considered. In this regard, we welcome the decision by the Russian Federation to present a comprehensive environmental evaluation to the next meeting of the Committee for Environmental Protection.

It has also been noted that the tourism industry in Antarctica has been increasing in recent years. Overall, the statistics provided in the report of the Secretary-General show an upward trend of tourists' visiting Antarctica from the early 1990s to the early 2000s — an increase of some 82 per cent in the number of shipborne tourists. The highest record was for the 1999-2000 season, at 14,402. The presence of such a large number of human visitors and vessels will undeniably pose new challenges to the Antarctic environment. A concerted effort to mitigate its impact on the ecosystem, flora and fauna of Antarctica is urgently needed.

Equally important is the need to address the issue of unregulated and illegal fishing in the Southern Ocean, in particular of krill and Patagonian toothfish.

My delegation is continuing its consultations with the delegation of Poland, representing the ATCP, on this agenda item with a view to arriving at an agreement on a consensus or Chairman's text of the draft resolution to be introduced by you, Sir, at a later stage for action to be taken by this Committee. As the new draft resolution on this issue is largely an updating

of the resolution adopted in 1999, we should be in a position to submit it very shortly for appropriate action.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to express Malaysia's deep appreciation to Poland and the ATCP for the kind invitation extended to Malaysia to observe the proceedings of their Meeting, held in Warsaw recently. This is a further demonstration of the increased openness of the Consultative Parties, which we welcome and which augurs well for the future cooperation between them and non-ATCP countries.

My delegation commends the continuing cooperation of the ATCP and the rest of the international community in sharing information pertaining to the activities of the Antarctic Treaty. Notwithstanding the deficiencies of the ATCP system, which we hope will be overcome over time, we are gratified that the mechanism of dialogue and cooperation that the ATCP and non-ATCP countries have forged in the context of the United Nations is working well and has yielded tangible results.

It is the hope of my delegation that the final debate on the question of Antarctica in this Committee will continue to provide a forum in which those within the system and those outside it can engage in a meaningful dialogue and exchange of information on Antarctica. This process should be further strengthened to ensure that the best interests of mankind will be served. We look forward to closer and more constructive cooperation in the coming years. We also call on the ATCP to continue to implement their commitments under the Antarctic Treaty and the relevant United Nations resolutions, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter.

Mr. Ahmad (Bangladesh): May I begin, Sir, by expressing the sincere appreciation of my delegation for your wise and effective handing of the affairs of the Committee during the past few weeks. We are nearing the successful conclusion of our work under your stewardship. My delegation would therefore like to congratulate you, the other members of the Bureau, as well as all our colleagues in the other delegations for a work well done.

May I also thank the Secretary-General for his very comprehensive yet concise report on the question of Antarctica, contained in document A/57/346. The report, while quite informative on the one hand, on the other evokes a lot of interest and curiosity in the reader to look for more information on the very important question of Antarctica.

Bangladesh, as a developing country grappling with the myriad challenges of development and poverty eradication, and being geographically far removed from Antarctica, has not been in a position to participate directly in the great scientific work that has been under way in Antarctica over past decades. However, that does not preclude our taking a keen interest in these matters. To the contrary, we believe that our future is closely tied to the findings of the various scientific research projects being pursued by different groups and countries in Antarctica. Therefore, we try to follow developments in this area as closely as possible.

We must therefore commend the Antarctic Treaty system and other international bodies, including the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, the International Hydrographic Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization, for their excellent work in these areas. Their work in finding out more about climate changes, global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer, Earth sciences, life sciences — including human biology — and so on is truly invaluable.

Excellent work is also being done by individual countries and scientists in these areas. We are indebted to all the scientists, technologists and other individuals involved in these activities, who work under extreme conditions, risking their lives and making great sacrifices in the service of science and humanity.

From the Secretary-General's report, we understand that significant achievements have been made in the search for and dissemination of information in these areas in recent times. The report notes that there has been a considerable reduction in the emission of chlorofluorocarbon gases and other ozone-depleting agents over the years as a result of concerted efforts by nations and organizations. However, the report also notes that the springtime ozone hole over the Antarctic reached a record area of almost 30 million square kilometres in September 2000. While I am not fully aware of the implications of this information, as a layman I understand that this is a very serious and disturbing development with dangerous consequences for human health and for the environment as a whole. On the one hand, we are elated to learn about the various items of good news

coming from the people working in this field; on the other, we are concerned by the many disturbing findings that reach us every day from them.

My delegation calls on the concerned organizations, countries and individuals to continue their valuable work. We appeal to all concerned to see to it that arrangements to ensure that the benefits of these works can be shared by all countries and peoples of the world equally are further strengthened. We propose that efforts be made to arrange for better dissemination of up-to-date information gathered from ongoing activities in and around Antarctica to different parts of the world through regular seminars and workshops held in various locations, involving scientists, scholars and the Government officials of different countries, with particular emphasis on the participation of developing countries.

To quote from the Secretary-General's report, we are all aware that

> "The primary purpose of the Antarctic Treaty is to ensure, in the interests of all mankind, that Antarctica should continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and should not become the scene or object of international discord. The Treaty provides for freedom of scientific investigation and promotes international cooperation in scientific research. It also prohibits any nuclear explosions in Antarctica and the disposal of radioactive waste material." (*A/57/346, para. 4*)

According to the Protocol on Environmental Protection, Antarctica is a natural reserve devoted to peace and science and mineral-resource activities other than scientific research are prohibited.

In conclusion, we call on all parties concerned to bear in mind the letter and the spirit of those pronouncements in all their activities in and around Antarctica.

The Chairman: Before adjourning the meeting, I should like to remind members that the deadline for submission of draft resolutions under the agenda item "Question of Antarctica" is 6 p.m. today, Tuesday, 30 October.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.

United Nations A/C.1/57/PV.25

General Assembly
Fifty-seventh session

Official Records

First Committee
25th meeting
Friday, 1 November 2002, 10 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Kiwanuka ..... (Uganda)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 59 (*continued*)

Question of Antarctica

General debate, consideration of and action on draft resolution (A/C.1/57/L.61)

The Chairman: The Committee will today take action on a draft resolution on the question of Antarctica submitted by the Chairman following consultations among groups and delegations.

The draft resolution is largely an updating of General Assembly resolution 54/45, of 1 December 1999. Inter alia, it takes note with satisfaction of the entry into force of the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, welcomes the continuing cooperation among countries undertaking scientific research and activities in Antarctica, and welcomes also the increasing awareness of, and interest in, Antarctica shown by the international community. The draft resolution also reaffirms the conviction that, in the interests of mankind, Antarctica should continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, and that it should not become the scene or object of international discord.

The draft resolution also welcomes the invitations extended to the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme to attend Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings in order to assist in their substantive work, and urges the parties to continue to extend such invitations for future Consultative Meetings. The draft resolution welcomes the practice by the Consultative Parties of providing information pertaining to their meetings, as well as other relevant information on Antarctica, so as to enable the Secretary-General to submit a report for the consideration of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session.

I would like to suggest that the Committee proceed to take a decision on the draft resolution contained in document A/C.1/57/L.61. Unless I hear any objection, I shall consider that the Committee agrees with that suggestion.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: The Committee will now take a decision on draft resolution A/C.1/57/L.61, entitled "Question of Antarctica".

I propose that the Committee adopt draft resolution A/C.1/57/L.61 by consensus. Unless I hear any objection, I shall consider that the Committee agrees to adopt the draft resolution.

Draft resolution A/C.1/57/L.61 was adopted.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): I wish to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for introducing the draft resolution on the question of Antarctica (A/C.1/57/L.61), which we have just adopted. My delegation is pleased that the Committee was once again in a position to adopt a draft resolution on the subject of Antarctica by consensus. My delegation also wishes to place on record our sincere appreciation to the delegation of

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Poland, representing the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties, for the cooperation extended to us in the consultation process.

As the Chairman himself has just highlighted, the new draft resolution is basically an updating of resolution 54/45, which was adopted on 1 December 1999. By adopting draft resolution A/C.1/57/L.61 this year, the Assembly will note with satisfaction the entry into force of the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, which, inter alia, reiterates the designation of the continent as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science. The Assembly would also continue to reaffirm that Antarctica should be managed and used in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and in the interests of maintaining international peace and security and promoting international cooperation for the benefit of mankind as a whole.

My delegation commends the continuing cooperation of the Consultative Parties and the rest of the international community in sharing information pertaining to activities related to the Antarctic Treaty. We trust that the triennial debate on the question of Antarctica in the First Committee will continue to provide the members of the international community, both within and outside the Antarctic Treaty system, with a forum for meaningful discourse.

We look forward to closer and more constructive cooperation in the coming years, in the interests of ensuring that Antarctica will remain a natural reserve devoted to peace and science, for the benefit of all humanity.

Mr. Ogonowski (Poland): I would just like to echo what the representative of Malaysia has said, and to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for introducing this important document, draft resolution A/C.1/57/L.61. I also wish to thank the delegation of Malaysia for its input in the preparation of the draft resolution.

The Chairman: The First Committee has thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 59, entitled "Question of Antarctica".

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman: The First Committee has met over the last several weeks to consider some of the most important issues on the international peace and security agenda. Those issues have ranged from small arms to the biggest arms. While we have worked in a businesslike fashion, we have not proceeded with business as usual, because there is nothing at all usual about the issues of international peace and security that we have addressed: each one is important. Most important of all, the Committee has reaffirmed the basic principle that multilateral cooperation is essential in addressing global security problems. That sound principle is the mighty rock upon which we must continue to build.

At the opening of this session, I reminded my colleagues of the need for the Committee to respond to the proposals in the Secretary-General's recent report on United Nations reform (A/57/387). That report emphasized, inter alia, the need to reduce the reporting requirements of the Secretariat, as well as the number of resolutions. I have no doubt that the members of the First Committee made every effort to achieve those goals, although we have in fact considered more draft resolutions and requested more reports than we did last year. While that will no doubt be an issue for the next Chairperson of the Committee to address, I urge all members to consider carefully the advantages of having fewer and more consolidated resolutions, as well as a smaller number of reports that are more focused and analytical. Real progress in these areas will enable all of us to devote our limited time and resources to achieving the most urgent and important items on our difficult agendas.

In assessing our progress in dealing with those items, the world will judge the effectiveness of our deliberations by the concrete progress achieved. That is precisely the kind of result-based approach that will best respond to the Secretary-General's call on the United Nations to keep its focus on doing what matters.

Accordingly, I urge all members of the Committee to engage in consultations before we meet next year to explore ways and means of responding more effectively to the Secretary-General's well-taken appeal. It goes without saying that progress in such difficult fields as disarmament and non-proliferation occurs incrementally, often over very many years. Like a stream cutting its way through a giant canyon, such progress often must overcome enormous obstacles.

Yet, dedicated efforts in these fields have shown that, with enough political will, vision and dedicated effort, it is indeed possible to move mountains. We may not have solved all the world's problems this

month, but we have made some progress. Of the 23 draft resolutions that were subject to recorded votes, 15 gained support compared with previous recorded votes, and over half of those gaining votes dealt with nuclear issues. But such simple comparisons of votes are risky, given the substantive differences in the texts of individual draft resolutions. Nevertheless, these votes represent a positive development. They suggest that the incremental process of building support for global norms is continuing, in spite of the persistent tensions in our troubled world today.

The Committee also adopted five new draft resolutions — on bilateral strategic nuclear arms reduction; on reduction in non-strategic nuclear weapons, on national legislation on arms transfers; on weapons of mass destruction; and on the promotion of multilateralism — which were approved either by large majorities or without a vote.

However, before we celebrate such achievements, any fair assessment might also note the persistence of some deeply divisive voting patterns on certain draft resolutions. There were, for example, more than 40 abstentions or negative votes on 10 draft resolutions, seven of which dealt with nuclear issues. It should also be noted that four draft resolutions lost support, compared with previous recorded votes on similar texts; all these dealt with weapons of mass destruction. These divisions show that, while the Committee is broadly unified on the fundamental goals of disarmament and non-proliferation, there remain some substantial disagreements on the appropriate means to achieve such goals. As long as our disagreements do not compromise our goals, they should best be seen as just part of the process of building support for global norms, which takes time and persistent effort. These votes suggest that work that remains ahead in pursuance of our goals.

Our broadest achievement has been to kindle faith in the fundamental objectives of disarmament and non-proliferation as a way to enhance international peace and security and in the essential role of multilateralism in pursuing that goal. That is no small accomplishment. It reflects well on the integrity of the Committee, and it should inspire hope for additional progress in the years to come.

I wish finally to express my great appreciation to all members of the Committee for the cooperation extended to me during this session. I have also been deeply impressed with the spirit of compromise and flexibility shown by all delegations during the entire session of the Committee. It was indeed a pleasure and an honour for me to work with such a distinguished group of professionals and experts.

I also thank members for their full cooperation and support in so efficiently utilizing the time and facilities allocated to the First Committee. It is my strong belief that the First Committee has once again set the benchmark for all other Committees in terms of effective time management and the efficient use of conference facilities.

I wish also to express my deepest appreciation and admiration to my fellow Bureau members, namely, my Vice-Chairmen, Ambassador José Nicolás Rivas of Colombia, Mr. Jamal Nassir Al-Bader of Qatar and Mr. Razvan Rusu of Romania, and, of course, our Rapporteur, Mr. Mehmet Samsar of Turkey. Their advice and assistance were instrumental in enabling me to effectively discharge my functions as Chairman of this body.

Allow me, on behalf of the Committee, to offer my sincere gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, for the support he and his staff from the Department for Disarmament Affairs have provided. My special thanks go to the Secretary of the First Committee, Mr. Mohammad Sattar, who is our bedrock, and his staff for all their tireless effort throughout this session of the Committee.

I also wish to thank all the interpreters, translators, record-keepers, press officers, document officers, conference officers and sound engineers who have diligently worked behind the scenes in order to bring the work of this Committee to a successful conclusion.

And, although they seldom get the credit they deserve, I also would like to pay tribute to the many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which brought information to this Committee and which have been reporting on our activities to their respective constituencies. The greater the public understanding and appreciation of the work that we do in this Committee, the greater will be the likelihood that national Governments will respond to the urgent demand for action to convert the principled goals of our important agenda into concrete achievements. I have little doubt that NGOs play and will continue to

play a vital role in that respect, and I wish all of them a very fruitful future.

The First Committee will reconvene next year, sometime in July or August, in order to elect a Chairperson for the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

The 2002 session of the First Committee is thus concluded.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.